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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP
INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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COUNTRY	USSR / Latvia	DATE:	
SUBJECT	Riga - population, living conditions, military and naval observations, degree and methods of Soviet control.	INFO.	21-27 March 1947
ORIGIN	USSR / Moscow	DIST.	29 April 1947
		PAGES	8 25X1
		SUPPLEMENT	

SOURCE US Naval Officer known to be completely reliable.

PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS

On 17 March 1947, I visited the Transportation Bureau of Intourist and requested that a journey be arranged to visit Riga and thence return to Moscow via Tallin and Leningrad. The director of the Transportation Bureau stated that such a journey could be arranged and requested that I let him know two days before my intended date of departure. He did not request any documents or passport but accepted my word that I was attached to the American delegation of the Council of Foreign Ministers. I was dressed in civilian clothes at the time.

On the following day I appeared at the Transportation Bureau and stated that I wished to depart by air on Thursday, 20 March. He replied that depending on weather I could obtain a ticket on the day before. The weather turned out to be unfavorable, and on Friday afternoon, 21 March, I obtained a ticket for Riga on the train departing that night. A member of the Swedish Legation, Mr. Carl Reinius, whom I have known for a period of six years, received permission from his Minister to accompany me on the trip. He also obtained a ticket.

The only documents required were our passports, in which no entry was made as to our destination or reasons for the journey. The director advised that upon arrival in Riga arrangements could be made for further travel to Tallin and Leningrad. The director asked whether we had received permission from the Foreign Office to make this journey and was satisfied with our reply that according to the Soviet press of several months back there were no restrictions on travel in the Soviet Union, and for that reason we considered such permission unnecessary.

JOURNEY TO RIGA

The train left from Rjevski Station at 2350. We occupied a two-person compartment in the one sleeping car which was attached to the train. There was no dining car, nor were there any freight or troop cars attached.

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On 22 March we passed through the devasted area between the towns of Rjev and Velikie-Luki, both of which towns had been almost completely wiped out but in which a slight amount of rebuilding was in progress. From the town of Rjev to the Latvian border there were vendors of food at each station. The main items available were meat, black bread, rolls and milk, with more butter as we proceeded westward. During this period of our trip about 200 passengers without tickets occupied places on top of and between the cars, clinging very precariously to their perches, some as far as Riga itself, a distance of about 400 kilometers. Conversations with these riders evinced the information that they were in search of food of any description and that they had heard that Latvia had quantities of potatoes and bread available. Among these riders were a great percentage of women and elderly men who shewed signs of malnutrition and general debilitation.

We reached the Latvian border well after dark, and there was no attempt made to check our documents, nor were there any other border formalities.

We arrived in Riga early on the morning of the 23rd and proceeded to the In-tourist hotel, the "Metropole," which we found to be an efficient, clean, small hotel.

No military movement was seen en route, and only small quantities of German goods were sighted. There was little material along the right-of-way except for salvaged steel and other metals.

RIGA

Having lived in Riga for a period of two years, from 1936 to 1938, I was fairly conversant with the physical aspects of the city at that time. War damage in the city was restricted mostly to the old part of town. The permanent pedestrian and vehicle [redacted] longer exists, but the railway bridge over the Daugava River, which paralleled the aforementioned bridge, is intact. The pontoon bridge likewise is intact but was in process of being removed prior to the spring ice spate. There is a new pedestrian and vehicle bridge, completed by the Russians in 1946, spanning the Daugava River about a mile north of the pontoon bridge. This bridge is of the supported arch type, about 800 meters long and 15 meters wide, carrying a single trolley car track, consisting of eight spans supported on rock-filled sunken [redacted]. The bridge is constructed very ingeniously, entirely of laminated wood, [redacted] impregnated with tar and unpainted. That it is recognized as a fire hazard is evidenced by the many "No Smoking" signs. This bridge could not be opened for big ship traffic.

The eastern bank of the Daugava in Riga has been almost completely demolished and is now in the process of reconstruction, the work being carried on by German prisoners of war, of which about 200 were seen working. A high board fence runs along the entire water front but is apparently intended only to safeguard the German prisoners, since the work under progress can easily be observed from the bridges. In the central part of Riga the important buildings which were destroyed were the telegraph building, the War Ministry and the famous Rome Hotel. The ex-American Legation building is intact, as are most of the big apartment buildings. The streets are in fair shape, although there was no sign of recent repair work. A single high radio mast dominates the city.

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LIVING CONDITIONS, RIGA

Based on conversations with carriage drivers, workmen, waitresses, musicians, and others who had been in Riga during the entire war, and also based on personal observations, between 60% and 75% of the city's population is now Russian. The Latvian language is rarely heard within the city but is still in evidence in the form of street signs, book stores, newspapers, and in radio broadcasts. Housing is less difficult than in Moscow, although the better apartments and quarters have been taken over by Russians. There is a sufficiency of water and little restriction on the use of electricity.

FOOD, RIGA

A visit to the gigantic food market, which was formerly housed in five Zeppelin [REDACTED], showed that while there is still food of most sorts available, the prices are but a little lower than the Moscow market prices for the same items. Items which were available and average prices therefor were:

Meat	70 rubles per kilo
Potatoes.	11 rubles per kilo
Beets.	10 [REDACTED] per kilo
Carrots	8 [REDACTED] per kilo
Black bread	35 [REDACTED] per kilo
White bread (little available)	35 rubles per kilo
Butter	150 [REDACTED] per kilo
Oranges.	25 rubles each
Cabbage.	Price unknown
Fancy cakes, with butter frosting	12 rubles per portion
Sugar.	90 rubles per kilo

Sugar was very scarce and there were long queues waiting to purchase the limit of 200 grams.

No white flour visible; no cooking oils and no United States products except for Libby's canned pineapple.

In the one big commercial food store there was obtainable practically anything in the food line at prices very little higher than the market prices. There were many complaints heard in the market about the high prices of things and about the shortcomings of the market regarding cleanliness and distribution.

There were a few stalls fringing the markets which bore signs stating that they were private enterprises, but these stalls sold only notions such as pencils, razor blades, rubber goods, etc., most of which were of German origin.

WAGES AND THEIR PURCHASING POWER

The average wage of a store clerk appeared to be 600 rubles on paper, but only 480 actually received. The rationed food was not sufficient for sustaining life and the remaining rubles available for food were insufficient to purchase the required

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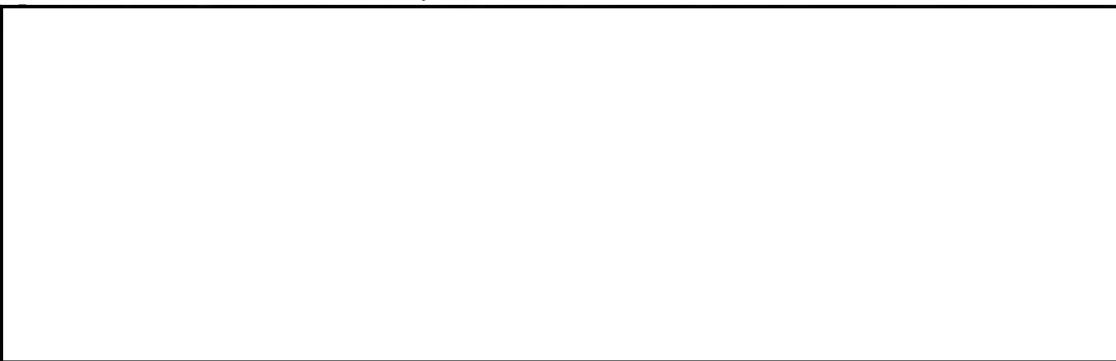
differential. As a result, black market sales of personal effects and bartering were active and doubtless pilferage from factories and shops served as additional income.

TEMPER OF THE PEOPLE

The impression was received that the Letts, who now form a very small part of the city's population, were despondent and with no hope for the future except for a "gentle" war of liberation as a last remaining hope. The same feeling also applied to Russians who had lived in Riga before the Russian occupation and had returned there after spending an educational period in the USSR. Most of the Latvian population which remains appears to be in the factories and on the farms, where collectivization is being carried out very cautiously.

SURVEILLANCE WHILE IN RIGA

We were treated as spies during our entire stay in Riga and surveillance was carried on in a very clumsy manner. I was unable to detect the presence of dictaphone or similar device in the room, but I twice caught maids listening at the door. We were passed along from shadow to shadow. We were photographed four times to my knowledge by a camera concealed in a carefully wrapped package. The opening of the shutter was actually witnessed both by myself and by Mr. Reinius, after I had called his attention to the clumsy maneuver.



After two days of negotiations for airplane tickets to Tallin, we were told that there was something wrong with our passports and were invited to visit the office of the NKVD. The particularly obnoxious NKVD captain in charge of the visa division was obviously Russian and not Latvian. He informed us that since we had no evidence of permission to visit Tallin or Leningrad we could not go to those places but must return to Moscow. I then asked him if he refused to permit our further travel, and after much beating about the bush he came out flatly with such a statement. He stressed all during our conversation that he was speaking for the Latvian Republic and not for the USSR. He made no comment when I expressed the hope that the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was conversant with this interruption in our original itinerary except to state that it was entirely within his responsibility and that he doubted whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would or could effect any change.

Upon arrival at the Metropole Hotel, we made inquiries regarding permission to take photographs around the town, and were told that we might take photographs

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freely. Consequently, over a period of two days both Mr. Reinius and I, carrying our cameras quite openly, took various pictures of war damage, churches, and street scenes. On Tuesday, 25 March, having crossed to the opposite side of the Daugava River, I took several pictures of the Riga waterfront. At that moment I was approached by a lieutenant of the militia who requested to see my photography permit. I replied that inasmuch as we had been given permission by Intourist and that we had been taking pictures openly for the past two days, apparently no written permission was necessary. I produced my diplomatic passport and suggested that he advise his superior of the occurrence. The lieutenant, however, requested that I deliver the film to him for exposure to the light. This I refused to do, and when he suggested that I go to the militia headquarters with him I told him that I was not obligated to do so but in view of his lack of knowledge concerning diplomatic status I would gladly accompany him there, since it was very close to the hotel. (I considered this an excellent opportunity to visit the militia headquarters.)

Upon arrival at that place, the chief being absent, I refused to wait for his re-appearance but left the entire film with the lieutenant, receiving therefor a receipt. On the following morning, about one hour prior to departure of our train for Moscow, a captain of the militia together with the aforementioned lieutenant appeared at the hotel and the following took place in my room, in the presence of the hotel director, the Intourist interpreter, Mr. Reinius, and the two militia officers. The captain apologized for the actions of the lieutenant, stating that the latter was not familiar with diplomatic privileges, and returned the empty film cartridge case to me. He then produced the developed negative, on which I had made eleven exposures, also enlargements of certain portions of the film. These enlargements showed views around town and a panorama of the Riga waterfront. On the latter enlargements were shown the three bridges which cross the Daugava River. The captain than informed me that while there was nothing of a serious nature in the pictures I had taken, yet the fact that bridges were included would make it necessary for him to obtain permission from his superior to deliver the negative to me. He further added that he thought this could be arranged possibly prior to our departure or if not, that the film would be forwarded to me within a few days. I told the captain that inasmuch as by the action of his lieutenant I had been forced to waste approximately twenty exposures still remaining on my film, I would take the film and the enlargements they had made as compensation. He replied that such a request was reasonable and again repeated that I would undoubtedly receive this material shortly. An "Act" was then drawn up covering the episode and signed by all witnesses.

I made it quite clear that if the local authorities objected to any of the pictures I had taken because of any military information, they had my permission to remove from the film such sections as they considered inappropriate to deliver to me. I also pointed out and showed to the captain pictures which I had purchased in a government book store in Riga showing approximately the same shoreline details as were contained in my negative. To date I have received neither the negatives nor the enlargements.

Mr. Reinius, who had not taken any pictures at the time of my entanglement with the militia, was not questioned as to whether or not he had engaged in like photography.

At no other time during our stay were we approached for documents of any sort.

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MILITARY INFORMATION

Riga appeared to be a navy town, although no naval installations were seen except one large building on the waterfront which was apparently the naval headquarters. In the area around this building were domiciled a number of officers, enlisted personnel and their families, ranging from a Rear Admiral (sighted) to seamen. Their insignia carried no other mark than the Russian abbreviation for Baltic Fleet. In addition to Red Fleet personnel in naval uniform there were many men clothed in army uniforms but bearing on their shoulder boards the Russian mark for Baltic Fleet.

NAVAL AVIATION CADET SCHOOL AND/OR BARRACKS

Surrounded by a wooden fence was a group of buildings on the waterfront. In the compound I observed a formation of Soviet naval personnel bearing the aviation insignia. Included in the formation and seen strolling about were younger officers and cadets. My estimate of the number probably attending this school is about 200.

NAVAL VESSELS

[REDACTED] craft were visible in the Daugava River in the vicinity of Riga, nor were the old [REDACTED] naval shipyards in operation. However, the naval base is probably located at the mouth of the Daugava, from which the Latvian navy formerly operated. Several references were overheard as to the naval work going on in the port of Libau.

ARMY PERSONNEL

There were comparatively few Army personnel seen around town, none of whom bore insignia designating their units except for one shoulder board sighted from a distance which read "47 D." However, some of the personnel bore a tank insignia and others an aviation insignia.

There are no vestiges left of the old Latvian [REDACTED] or trimmings, and I could not detect the presence of any pure Letts in uniform.

RETURN TRIP TO MOSCOW

Ostensibly because of weather conditions, air transportation was not available for the return trip and we departed from Riga at 1130, 26 March, traversing most of Latvia during daylight hours.

At the stations there was considerably more food available than in Russia proper and the prices were lower; for example, a hamburger [REDACTED] rubles and a kilo of butter, 140 rubles.

We shared a four-passenger coupe with a demobilized major of the Soviet artillery, who is now employed in a Riga bicycle factory, and with a rather shy Jewish girl who was proceeding to Moscow to take examinations, the successful culmination of which would permit her to teach in the Riga secondary schools. Neither of these passengers had any written permission allowing them to travel. The ex-major had obtained his ticket by means of a special card given to recipients of higher battle awards,

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and the girl by bribing the ticket seller at the station. The latter practice is quite customary, since otherwise it is almost impossible for a Soviet citizen not having high connections to obtain reservations in the sleeping cars. The ex-major, in the course of conversation, told me that his particular bicycle factory plans to produce 100,000 vehicles during the coming year and that they would probably put into production a small one-and-one-half horsepower gasoline motor for use on the heavier type of bicycle.

Prior to crossing the frontier, the same phenomenon took place as on the outbound journey, i.e., the clambering of non-ticket-holding passengers to occupy spaces between the cars and on top of the cars. Among these was a small girl who appeared to be about eight but later stated that she was ten. This girl had taken her father from Pustoshka, in Russia proper, to a hospital in Rezekne, Latvia, a distance of about 120 kilometers, and was now returning home unaccompanied. Fearing that she might fall off, we smuggled her into the car and bribed the conductor to let her stay. After thawing out and being fed by us, she said that the Rezekne hospital was the nearest one available to the ordinary citizens and that what she had done was not uncommon.

As we proceeded towards Moscow, the outside passengers left the train and by the following morning there were none left.

As on the outbound trip, no movement of troops was witnessed and only small quantities of freight were seen Moscow-bound. In the latter category were two railway trains carrying trucks of Russian and American makes, plus some very fine German passenger cars.

We arrived in Moscow on schedule, 31 hours after leaving Riga.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION AND IMPRESSIONS

The railroad line shows no vestiges of the double tracking having been replaced and is now almost entirely single tracked.

The extra heavy snow cover is melting very rapidly and will undoubtedly result in flooding of fields during the spring.

The Soviets living in Riga look down upon the Letts and classify them as being [redacted] and too stubborn to accept the "much more advanced Soviet culture." This attitude is resented by the Letts, who very properly point out that the standard of living had been considerably reduced since the arrival of Sovietism. The latter were quite open in expressing their resentment and hatred of the Russians, affirming that they fared better under the German regime.

In addition to an inordinately great number of militia, roving patrols of army and naval personnel were seen.

A ghetto was established in Riga during the German regime having a barbed wire encircled perimeter of about five kilometers.

Increased bureaucracy over that which existed in 1936-1938 was much in evidence; small shops employ many workers in excess of the actual requirements.

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Various organizations, such as the Baltic Fleet and the merchant fleet, maintain shops open to the public, all of which had standard prices.

The Daugava River was being prepared for the spring ice spate by almost continuous blasting of ice in the narrow stretches of the river.

No air activity was noticed during our entire stay, but this may have been due to the poor weather conditions.

No icebreakers were operating in the river, and the channel for moving the segments of the pontoon bridge was being broken by prisoners of war.

There were no reports or rumors of any organized resistance to Soviet authority except rumors about such occurrences in both Lithuania and Estonia.

CONCLUSION

The Latvian Republic is now completely a Soviet republic in every sense of the word, with only a few vestiges, rapidly disappearing, of the state as it formerly was. The political, military, commercial, propaganda, press, and educational systems all have the undeniable Moscow pattern.

The Latvian Republic is controlled by fear, by population penetration, and by MVD activities. It is extremely unlikely that the remnants of the original Latvian population would start a spontaneous revolt on even a small scale, nor could they give much support to any outside forces which might be brought to bear.

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